United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

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WILDLIFE SERVICES—WASHINGTON

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Washington

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Washington Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from wildlife damage or threats. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve conflicts.

Washington is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, forests, coastline, and desert environments. This ecological and geographic diversity gives the State a remarkable variety of wildlife species. With nearly six million residents and population growth higher than the national average, human conflicts with wildlife are expected to increase.

WS biologists and field technicians help Washington's fruit and livestock producers reduce losses from birds and predators. WS protects aircraft and the lives of crews and air passengers from dangerous wildlife collisions. The program addresses serious bird and mammal damage to the State's transportation infrastructure, municipal properties, and public and private buildings. In addition, WS helps protect public health and safety, crops, and natural resources, including threatened and endangered species like the Columbian white-tailed deer, salmon, and steelhead.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Managing coyotes to protect livestock and wildlife
- Protecting public and private property from damage by birds
- Protecting public health by monitoring for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (bird flu)

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Washington:

- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting threatened and endangered species and other sensitive wildlife from predators
- Protecting livestock and poultry from wildlife predators
- Protecting roads, irrigation ditches, timber, conservation sites, and property from damage by beaver and nutria
- Protecting Washington's transportation infrastructure, crops, dairies, feedlots, and public and private structures from bird damage

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with aircraft cost U.S. civil aviation $550 million annually as a result of damage to equipment and associated costs. In Washington, 136 public-use civilian airports, 318 private airports, and three major military air bases conduct more than one million aircraft operations each year. At the same time, gull and geese populations, which pose the greatest threat to those airports, are at record levels. These birds are of particular concern at several of the State's busiest airports.

The WS program is recognized nationally and internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards. NWRC personnel also maintain a national strike database used to monitor trends and species that pose the greatest concern to aviation.

Applying this scientific expertise, WS provides assistance to more than 40 civilian and military airports each year in Washington. On-site evaluations, as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments, are completed before direct management work is done. In addition, WS biologists provide training in wildlife deterrence and disposal to airport employees statewide.

Protecting Human Health and Safety, Property, and Crops— Several bird and mammal species cause extensive damage to property and crops and threaten the health and safety of Washington residents. For decades, WS' NWRC has been the leader in investigating and developing methods for managing bird damage to agriculture and property, and threats to public health and safety. NWRC scientists have been responsible for the development of many

of the management tools in use today, including repellants, capture techniques, and ecologically safe toxicants. Each year, Washington WS provides both advice and direct assistance for problems with gulls, pigeons, starlings, Canada geese and other birds as well as beaver, nutria, and coyote throughout the State.

Buildings, bridges, and other structures in Washington sustain millions of dollars in damage from fecal contamination and nesting activities of starlings, pigeons, gulls, and other birds. Bird droppings are corrosive to paints, metals, and other building materials, and pose health hazards to workers and the public. The cost of cleaning and repainting a single bridge spanning the Columbia River can exceed $1 million. Starlings, pigeons, and gulls also cause more than $6 million in damage to Washington's fruit industry annually. Migrating Canada geese cause substantial damage to crops, and resident urban Canada geese population cause millions of dollars in damage due to beach closures and fecal contamination of city parks and private properties. Disease concerns have led to the closure of public swimming beaches.

Beaver populations in Washington have been increasing, resulting in flooding of homes, personal property, and timberlands; washing out roads; dropping trees along creeks; and burrowing in irrigation ditches. Populations of nutria, an invasive rodent, have dramatically increased in recent years. Nutria compromise irrigation structures with their burrowing and damage wetlands by consuming vegetation. Predation, primarily by coyotes, causes millions of dollars in damage to Washington's livestock industry annually, and predators have been increasingly involved in attacks on humans.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—WS protects threatened and endangered species from predation and damage. The State is home to six runs of threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead. Nine more runs are listed as proposed or candidate species due to declining populations.

NWRC scientists have researched ways to reduce or relocate gull colonies that threaten downstream migrant salmon and steelhead. Research on egg oiling techniques and sight barriers have provided new management alternatives for resolving gull problems. They developed an innovative overhead wiring system that excludes gulls and other fish-eating birds from dams where the worst predation occurs. In cooperation with Federal and State agencies, WS has installed overhead wire grids at dams along the Columbia/Snake River system where downstream migrant smolt pass. It conducts active bird harassment programs to further disperse persistent predating birds and conducts a program to reduce the number of northern pike minnow feeding on protected species at several dams.

In addition to protecting threatened and endangered fish species, WS has helped to protect the endangered Columbian white-tailed deer and the pygmy rabbit from coyote depredation and, the program stands ready to provide future assistance as needed.

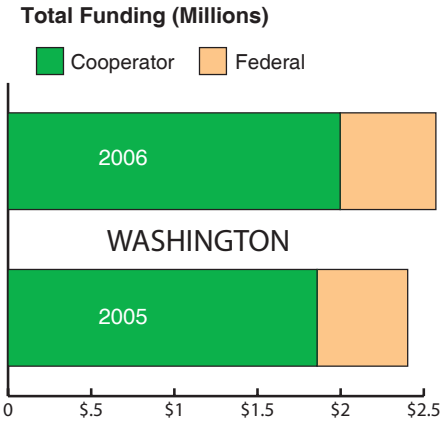
Looking to the Future

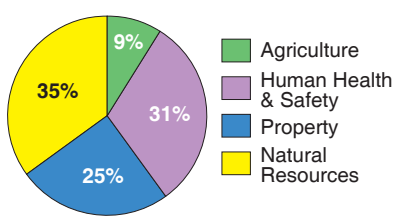
For Washington wildlife managers, public safety has become a growing concern, particularly at airports. Increased travel through Washington airports, coupled with the population growth of many bird species, has created a greater need for airport managers to deal with threats posed by wildlife.

Predator and aquatic mammal damage to livestock, agricultural, and forestry resources is also increasing. State and private entities are turning to WS for much needed assistance in managing damage caused primarily by coyotes, beavers, and nutria. State laws restrict trapping, however, making it more difficult and expensive for WS to help. These restrictions, in combination with limited resources, have led to unresolved problems with predators and aquatic mammals throughout the State.

Washington Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators who have a vested interest in the program: agricultural producers, private individuals, businesses, and other Federal, State, and local government agencies. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems, or they play a role in wildlife damage management.





Major Cooperators

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Puget Sound Naval Shipyard
- SeaTac, Port Angeles, and Spokane International Airports
- Seattle Waterfowl Management Committee (14 cities, counties, and municipal entities)
- Everett Naval Air Station
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- County public utility districts, governments, and airports
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Washington State Department of Parks and Recreation
- Washington State Department of Transportation

NWRC Research Station in Washington

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At present, the research at WS' NWRC Olympia field station focuses on efforts to alleviate damage inflicted by bear, beaver, deer and elk, mice, mountain beaver, pocket gopher, porcupine, and voles. Nonlethal management methods are a priority and applied studies are conducted to develop new products (e.g., repellents, attractants, delivery systems), and investigate forest management options to reduce resource vulnerability. Because new tools cannot be created without a fundamental understanding of the problem, research of a more basic nature also is conducted.